

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 02598 271737Z

22

ACTION NEA-10

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R 271716Z APR 76

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7433

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 2598

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, LE

SUBJECT: VISIT OF JIBRAN MAJDALANI TO DAMASCUS

REF: DAMASCUS 2596

1. REFTEL REPORTED THAT PRESIDENT ASAD HAD RECEIVED LEBANESE LAWYER JIBRAN MAJDALANI AT NOON APRIL 26 SHORTLY BEFORE MEETING WITH KAMAL ASSAD. MAJDALANI WAS MEMBER OF BAATH PARTY LEADERSHIP DURING MID-SIXTIES, FORCED OUT OF SYRIA AS RESULT OF SALAH JADID COUP IN 1966. HE HAS SINCE BEEN LIVING IN LEBANON AND REPORTEDLY HAS TIES WITH JUMBLATT. HE WAS THEN AND IS NOW ASSOCIATED WITH POLITICAL GROUPING CRITICAL OF ASAD TO WHICH MFA AMERICAN AFFAIRS DIRECTOR HAMOUD SHOUFI ALSO BELONGS (SHOUFI WAS BAATH PARTY SECGEN IN MID-SIXTIES FOR SHORT PERIOD). SHOUFI-MAJDALANI GROUP IN TURN APPARENTLY IN CONTACT WITH OTHER SYRIAN EXILES LED BY CO-FOUNDER OF BAATH PARTY SALAH BITAR, WHO WAS OFFICIALLY PARDONED BY PRES. ASAD IN DECEMBER 1975 BUT DECIDED NOT TO REUTRN TO SYRIA.

2. PRESIDENTIAL COUNSELOR DAOUDI TOLD US APRIL 27 THAT SIGNIFICANCE OF VISIT WAS NOT ONLY FACT THAT IT TOOK PLACE BUT ALSO CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 DAMASC 02598 271737Z

THAT MAJDALANI-ASAD MEETING OFFICIALLY REPORTED BY SYRIAN NEWS

MEDIA. DAOUDI SAID THAT PRES. ASAD'S POLICY WAS TO "EXTEND HIS HAND TO SUPPORTERS OF MICHEL AFLAQ" AND IF THEY RECIPROCATED TO WELCOME THEM BACK TO SYRIA.

3. COMMENT: IT IS INTERESTING THAT MAJDALANI, UNLIKE BITAR, HAS COME TO DAMASCUS TO RECEIVE OLIVE BRANCH EXTENDED BY PRESIDENT. DAOUDI'S REMARKS PROBABLY DO NOT TELL THE FULL STORY. TIMING OF MAJDALANI'S VISIT AND HIS KNOWN JUMBLATT ASSOCIATION MAY INDICATE THAT PUBLIC RECONCILIATION IS ANOTHER LINK IN SYRIAN EFFORT TO ENCIRCLE JUMBLATT. ALSO SHOUFI IS PROFESSED ADMIRER OF RAYMOND EDDE. MAJDALANI MAY ALSO BE. THUS, MAJDALANI'S VISIT PERHAPS AFFORDED ASAD A FURTHER OPPORTUNITY TO PROCLAIM HIS NEUTRALITY IN LEBANESE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. WE WOULD WELCOME ANY FURTHER LIGHT EMBASSY BEIRUT OR INR/RNA/NE MAY BE ABLE TO SHED ON MAJDALANI'S CURRENT ACTIVITIES AND HIS APRIL 26 VISIT TO DAMASCUS.

MURPHY

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